

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Board

**HELD ON WEDNESDAY 13 MARCH 2024 AT 10.00 AM
HYBRID - DIAMOND ROOM, CORNERSTONE ARTS CENTRE, 25 STATION
RD, DIDCOT OX11 7NE AND MICROSOFT TEAMS**

Present:

Members: Richard Benwell (Chair), Ian Boll, Camilla Burrow, Tim Coates, Tom Curtis, Professor Jeremy Biggs, Professor David Macdonald, James Price, David Rouane, Rosie Rowe and Simon Smith

Officers: Kevin Jacob, Amber Lyford, Matt Whitney, Huw Thomas and Lizzie Moore

Guests: Chloe Edwards, Melissa Felipe Cadillo, Ej Milner-Gulland and Stephen Thomas

22 Apologies, conflicts of interest and Chair's announcements

Apologies received from Gill Aitken, (Landowner Representative), and Michelle Leek, (Defra Representative).

There were no conflicts of interest.

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and introductions were made. The Chair started by highlighting that biodiversity net gain is now mandatory as of 12 February 2024 and the guidance change which could potentially discourage local authorities (LAs) going above 10% for biodiversity net gain contributions. The Chair noted that there are opportunities to go above the baseline where it could be supported by robust evidence, and it was felt that Oxfordshire is keen to do so. The Chair also emphasised the importance of private funding now that there is no longer the potential for Government funding.

23 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the Board meeting held on 13 December 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

24 Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Manager Update

Matt Whitney, Local Nature Partnership Manager provided a verbal update on his work and activities since the last Board meeting.

Highlights were:

- Presenting at Green Finance Conference in January
- Participating in Natural England board and Executive Community workshop in January
- Engaging with Thames water
- Collaborating with Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) on their Strategic Economic Plan
- Working with Ecosystem Knowledge Network on training around nature finance
- Attending the Nature North Conference in Newcastle
- Supporting Wiltshire County Council in the relaunch of the Wiltshire Local Nature Partnership.

The Chair thanked Matt for the update.

25 Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy progress

The Chair welcomed Chloe Edwards, (Oxfordshire County Council) to discuss this item. The Chair asked Chloe to potentially discuss any emerging themes and areas of ambition for Oxfordshire and how engagement is going. Especially highlighting the context around engagement and feedback from the farming community and the need to ensure any nature plans made are inclusive of these communities.

Chloe presented some slides which discussed the below topics:

- Progress against Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs' (Defra) steps of preparing contents of a local nature recovery strategy (LNRS)
- Mapping
- Project timeline
- Engagement and priorities
- Requests made to Defra during a recent meeting

Following the presentation, discussion was had around ensuring stakeholders involved are diverse and representation is inclusive of residents across the whole county. Camilla Burrow noted that there is no capacity within the County Council to carry out the data analysis work needed and asked the Board to assist in finding an external resource for this, David MacDonald suggested he could potentially assist.

Tim Coates referred to the steps set out by Defra and whether a shadow step 2 could be included to capture work that is currently being carried out. Chloe advised that this is something they would like to include but it needs to be a consistent and inclusive approach across all groups in Oxfordshire and they are awaiting further guidance.

The Chair referred to the importance of the priorities and objectives and asked for an idea around the scale of effort likely to come from the Oxfordshire LNRS. Chloe explained the process around narrowing down the long list of priorities to a short list with the guidance provided by Defra. Currently they are in the early stages of understanding what the people

of Oxfordshire want and the local strategies and work that already exists. There will be a workshop in May where the priorities will be shown to the public for feedback and then adapted following feedback which is something that doesn't seem to be being done with other LNRSs. Chloe also highlighted that National Highways are looking at possibilities within LNRSs to create green bridges.

Simon Smith suggested the priorities will need to be mappable and will likely be habitats and species as Defra have brought in the treatment of species, noting there is a species working group already in place looking into this.

David Rouane queried if there is ongoing interaction with local plans which are being created. Chloe confirmed that they are aware local plans need to be brought in but also need to balance the focus with other aspects. The mapping exercise through May – July will help with this and will be a key point for asking the district councils whether the LNRS works with their local plans.

Matt Whitney also clarified that there is ongoing engagement with the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Planning Advisory Group (PAG). Ian Boll suggested this could go to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) as well.

26 People's Assembly

The Chair welcomed Melissa Felipe Cadillo, (Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery at Oxford University), who presented slides on a proposed Citizen Assembly for Nature, joined by Ej Milner-Gulland and Stephen Thomas also in the meeting.

The presentation went over plans to host a Citizen's Assembly to help with answering the challenging questions on nature recovery by bringing together key stakeholders including:

- Oxfordshire County Council
- District Councils
- Local organisations
- Researchers
- Citizens

Melissa asked the Board for assistance in defining the guiding questions that would be asked within the citizens assembly and their thoughts on the concept.

Camilla Burrow raised a question around funding for this plan, Melissa explained they are part of the biodiversity programme and have some budget left but are simultaneously looking for further funding.

Rosie Rowe highlighted the importance around aligning with the existing work in progress across the county and the avoidance of duplication or clashing of work. Councillor David Rouane added further concerns around the calling the event a citizen's assembly and suggested a rebranding/renaming to avoid some negative connotations. Melissa added they plan to host this at the end of 2024 to avoid clashing with other ongoing work but to benefit from the existing momentum.

Concerns were raised around the level of diversity and representation within the Citizen's Assembly and the value of hosting one in this instance in which Melissa explained they will push to be as representative as possible. With regards to the value of the assembly,

Melissa explained this will come down to the questions posed as that will guide the whole event. Ej echoed that the questions being asked is fundamental to the event being successful and that the University of Oxford is keen to invest time and money into this as it views it as a learning opportunity that is broader than the Oxfordshire context alone.

Simon Smith suggested two viewpoints on the timing of this event, the first being if it was happening currently, it would be valuable to inform LNRS, there would be a low risk of engagement fatigue however the workload would be high. The second is for the citizen's assembly to be hosted around the time the LNRS is ready to go live and move into the delivery phase as the assembly could help to inform the delivery and potentially help with a reduction in workload.

27 Health and Nature update

Dr Lizzie Moore introduced a report and shared a presentation on this item focusing on Inclusive Nature Recovery in Oxfordshire. The presentation highlighted the current focuses:

- Building capacity and collaboration through the Health and Nature Subgroup
- Developing a Green Social Prescribing pathway
- Supporting LNRS engagement
- Inclusive Nature Recovery

Lizzie explained the approach to Inclusive Nature Recovery, covering the challenges and the opportunities and the process of developing the understanding of Inclusive Nature Recovery. Current work around this involves a workshop which will be held in May and a longer board session following that later this year.

Matt Whitney emphasised that it is key to have everyone involved and interested in this process and stated this approach needs to be utilised across the Board as a whole. Many members of the Board agreed with Matt's observations here.

Rosie Rowe stated she believes having these perspectives and voices within a workshop is the right way to do it. Highlighting there is lots of learnings that can be taken from work in other sectors such as the work around encouraging communities to get involved in active travel which while being a large culture change is something that is adopted when the barriers are removed.

David Rouane referred to increasing the number of people working within the sector stating that two changes were made early on, one of which was removing unpaid internships, the second was removing academic qualifications that are not necessary to be qualified to do some roles from the employment criteria.

The Chair mentioned the importance of including wider groups, such as landowners and tenants, within this work. It doesn't fall within the typical Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) definition but is still useful to consider.

The Board agreed to endorse this approach.

28 Operationalising the Nature Finance Strategy

Matt Whitney and Huw Thomas jointly presented this update. Matt started by providing a background on the work done thus far:

- The Oxfordshire Nature Finance Strategy was published in July 2023
- The concept of a revolving fund for nature was presented to the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP) Board in September 2023
- Huw Thomas joined as the Nature Finance Manager in November 2023

Matt then described the bids the team have submitted for funding since the last Board meeting. One was a collaborative project bid into the Nature Environment Investment Readiness Fund (NEIRF). Successful applicants will be notified in July 2024. The other application resulted in £300k being awarded by Innovate UK. Half of this funding will go towards net zero capacity at South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse District Councils, West Oxfordshire District Council and Cherwell District Council. The other half will go towards a project which Huw provided some further details on. The deliverables for this project are:

- Establishing high integrity nature market principles for Oxfordshire
- Market assessment
- Development of a nature-based carbon sequestration methodology
- Expansion of Oxford City Council's Area-based insetting approach
- Establishing a 'shop' for other ecosystem services
- Landholder engagement strategy and pipeline development

Matt then continued to explain other ideas they are looking at to attract other capital funding and the approach they will look to take in showing the investible propositions in Oxfordshire, explaining that investors and buyers want larger projects at greater scale.

Finally, next steps were discussed. Matt believes a county scale is a good scale to do this work on but there are conversations being had on regional scale as well, including through Ox-Cam and with the South East Nature Partnership.

Simon Smith supported this holistic approach and suggested that a policy linked to the LNRS could be beneficial and have a safety protocol to these funding channels to underpin the right habitats in the right place. Simon also highlighted another NEIRF bid looking at a grass lands toolkit and code of practice to help address the balance of grass lands and funding other areas are receiving.

In Jeremy Biggs' view it would be beneficial to have discussions with the water industry as there a lot of county wide initiative work going on with the Oxfordshire/Buckingham Fresh Water Network and discussions around financing and how it relates to the LNRSs.

Tom Curtis added that the LNRS has an amazing spatial plan but needs a linked business plan to enable it to fully fund recovery by being part of a strategy that has both a spatial plan and a business plan within it.

29 Board membership

The Chair advised that with Dr Prue Addison being on maternity leave it is likely that Matthew Stanton will be joining the Board until she returns. The Chair invited any concerns to be raised following this meeting. If none received, Matthew Stanton will be invited into the Board.

30 Oxfordshire's current affairs updates

No issues were raised under this heading.

31 Any other business

David MacDonald briefly discussed the badger control issues within the county, adding he circulated a thought piece with the group previously that written on this topic. Defra have since published a paper without much change following criticisms which were raised. David advised for the next meeting he is hoping to share a map to show the likely areas where the badger culls will be implemented.

The Chair ended the meeting by re-highlighting the net gain guidance update mentioned at the beginning of the meeting. He advised that the LNP should use some of the previous work done to demonstrate a county wide need and this will come to the Board to endorse, this may be shared with the Board before the next meeting.

32 Dates of future meetings

12 June 2024
18 September 2024
11 December 2024

The meeting closed at 12.00 pm.